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ABSTRACT

Remarks in this article were made as part of a panel discussion presented at the Planned Parenthood-World Population combined Southeast Council and National Board Meeting, Savannah, Georgia, in May 1970. The problems and consequences of an increasing birth rate are indicated along with the need for reducing present rates of population growth and eventual stabilization of population size at some manageable level. Commitment to voluntary family planning, enabling a couple to regulate its family size and respecting its right to do so, is urged. To this end, governmental policies designed to influence fertility must in large measure depend upon a high degree of congruence between the overall society's objectives, and those of the individuals comprising that society. While the principle of free choice will not automatically assure reduction in fertility, it will be consistent with our traditional emphasis on the dignity of the individual. (BL)

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Population Control, Family Planning and Planned Parenthood *

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In the developing countries of the world remarkably rapid progress has been made toward conquering various communicable diseases with concomitant reduction in mortality rates and prolongation of life expectancy at birth. However, since birth rates have remained high, population growth in virtually all less developed countries tends to outstrip economic development and food production threatening famine and continued impoverishment in many countries. In addition, the high proportion of children in their population places a grievous burden on "have not" societies that even the most industrialized societies would find difficult to carry.

Within the United States, although our birth rates are modest compared with the less developed countries, the combination of our present population growth rates and the increasing compaction of our national population into our metropolitan areas is manifestly producing serious assaults upon human well being as a result of crowding. In addition our affluence and our enormous industrial productivity permit most of us to take an enthusiastic part in the degradation of our natural environment placing serious strains on the world's non-renewable resources and also upon our social institutions.

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* Remarks made as part of a panel discussion presented at Planned Parenthood-World Population combined Southeast Council and National Board Meeting, Savannah, Georgia on May 7, 1970.

** The views expressed in my remarks are personal. Any shortcomings in logic or presentation are my responsibility alone.

Our very real environmental pollution problems in this country arise largely from our geographic distribution of people, our affluence and our reluctance to change either the behavior of our industrial corporations where the almighty dollar is concerned or our behavior as individual consumers where our short range comfort or convenience is involved. The pollution of our air, water and land is a problem in its own right demanding that aggressive steps be taken promptly to reduce or control our varied effluents as rapidly as possible. In addition, we must take steps to reduce the existing social and economic pressures which lead to the continuing over-concentration of our population in our metropolitan areas and the depopulation of our hinterlands. So much for pollution control and migration which should not be primary concerns of the present meeting.

Let us agree that present rates of world population growth cannot continue indefinitely without dire consequences for the health and well being of billions of humans. And let us also agree that a demographic Armageddon will almost surely come to pass unless mankind reduces present rates of population growth and eventually stabilizes population size at some manageable level.

Many thoughtful observers have come to the conclusion that population growth in the United States as well as in the rest of the world will continue to be excessive even if all children born were genuinely wanted and planned by their parents. There are eloquent spokesmen for the view that the so-called "freedom to breed" can no longer be permitted. Such Cassandras tell us that the "wanted" child is the problem rather than the "unwanted" child. In attempting to deal with the allegedly great surplus of "wanted" children, a number of people have suggested imposing various anti-natalist economic or social constraints and sometimes hint darkly about the probable need for

harsher measures in the future if we do not subtly force couples to reduce their family size in conformity with some national goal approximating replacement levels or less.

Since we are dealing with problems of enormous complexity it is perhaps not surprising that the various measures proposed usually differ in their implications as to who should do what to whom in order that man's demographic future may be more rosy. However, a review of official pronouncements on family planning and population by various United Nations agencies and heads of state-- including both President Johnson and President Nixon --reveals three fundamental themes:

1) The integrity and well being of the family should be basic goals of society;

2) The right of the individual to decide for himself the number and spacing of his children should be inviolate;

3) All couples should have available to them the information and technical means to implement their personal decisions as to family size and spacing.

For better or for worse we have arrived at a position where no practical minded public official can espouse or condone activities which abrogate the right of couples to determine their own family size.

In my own view the principle of free choice by the individual family is a prerequisite to gaining the full cooperation of individual couples whose cooperation is absolutely necessary if average family size is to be diminished on an appreciable scale in the years ahead. I also consider it highly probable that couples wishing to plan their family size carefully will be acutely suspicious of any governmental or quasi-governmental activities which can conceivably be interpreted as pressuring them to have fewer or

more children than they personally decide is appropriate for them in the light of their own views about their own life circumstances and their own prospects.

Since demographic phenomena are the consequences of millions of individuals making decisions and acting independently on those decisions, governmental policies designed to influence fertility must in large measure depend upon a high degree of congruence between the overall society's objectives, and those of the individuals comprising that society. Especially in a democracy, the individual couple's fertility decisions can be influenced most effectively by governmental policies whose premises and objectives they comprehend and share. And this is true whether a government's policy is pro-natalist(as was the case in much of Europe in the 1930's) or anti-natalist as is true in most of the world today. In large scale collective human enterprises, there is never an iron-clad guarantee that the outcome will be desirable or predictable. I have heard it said that "there is no certain means by which people can be prevented from following the Pied Piper to their destruction if their childishness and lack of realism are of this extraordinary nature." While self destruction may indeed be an omnipresent possibility for mankind, there seems to be no reason to assume that any substantial number of people in a given society will knowingly seek such a fate for themselves.

Since this meeting is sponsored by Planned Parenthood, I assume that one question before the house is "What role should Planned Parenthood play, if any, in population control within the U.S.?" My own personal view is that Planned Parenthood -- like the good shoemaker -- should stick to its last. It should follow its tradition -- the glorious tradition of Margaret Sanger -- in seeking to assure that parenthood will be deliberate rather than accidental

or incidental. You have served humanity well in your efforts to provide information necessary for the individual to comprehend the very real commitment involved in truly responsible parenthood and to make a series of enlightened decisions about whether and when and how often to become a parent. You have in many cases delivered the technical skills and services necessary for the individual to implement his decisions within the dictates of his conscience. In a society with humane aspirations, responsible parenthood should be every bit as important for human welfare in a period of population decline or a period of stable population size as it is when we are worried about excessive population growth. For this reason I sincerely hope you will not now allow yourselves to be sidetracked by population bombmanship from helping the individual couple arrive at and implement, a responsible personal decision, as to the timing and number of children they want. Facilitating personal control over ones own fertility should be a primary objective of Planned Parenthood rather than an instrument in a feverish campaign for a stable population size.

If we mean what we say about helping couples to plan the timing and number of their children, the array of services and guidance ideally available to the individual should include the usual forms of contraception as well as voluntary sterilization for male and female. Safe, aseptic abortion should ideally also be available to the woman upon her request as the final step in assuring that no baby will be born unwanted by its mother with all the physical and psychic risks associated with being unwanted. Obviously, we urgently need to develop better and simpler birth control methods than now exist, but our present methods can be a great boon to many couples in all walks of life who for one reason or another are still unsuccessful in limiting or spacing their children as they wish.

On the other hand, couples who are involuntarily barren also need help from family planning programs to accomplish the conception they desire. While there <u>are</u> those who scoff at the notion of eliminating unwanted <u>in</u>-fertility at a time when the world is troubled by seemingly runaway population growth rates, they have either not thought through their moral priorities or else have decided that the hopes and aspirations of individuals (other than themselves, of course) are far less consequential than the overall population growth curve.

I have often wondered why the machinery to help place children for adoption or in foster homes is not tied in more closely with voluntary family planning programs. Whether the couples are barren by choice or by biological accident, those seeking to adopt children are certainly <u>planning</u> their parenthood; and unless phrases like "family planning" and "planned parenthood" are simply euphemisms for reducing the national birth rate willy-nilly, I should think assisting the adoption process would help keep Planned Parenthoods' focus on family well being and responsible parenthood which you have served so well in the past. And the effort seems well worth making because of the obvious benefits both to couples wanting children and to the strays sorely needing parents who want them.

As regards our demographic future, lively debates and exhortations on population matters are increasingly in the forefront for public scrutiny and popular discussion. They are becoming part of the intellectual and emotional milieu in which today's adults procreate and today's children grow to maturity and develop their own values and attitudes. Thus, population facts, population myths, and population forecasts all contribute to the "conventional wisdom" which influences the individual in making decisions as he views -- with satisfaction or dismay -- the human and physical environment in which he lives

and which he foresees for himself and his progeny. This is desirable and proper in a democracy. However, one hopes that our very legitimate concern about excessive population growth in the years ahead will not be perverted into propaganda efforts which, by design or by accident, stampede us into willingness and even eagerness to ameliorate our society's population problems by ruthless measures to force down the fertility of the poor, the politically impotent and the unpopular among us. As grave as the problems that lie ahead may be, I find it difficult to believe that a latter-day Chicken Little will save us with alarums and excursions because "the sky is falling".

Family planning efforts are intended to strengthen the family by assuring that every child born will indeed be wanted by its parents. As desirable as family planning may be for these reasons alone, it does not by itself guarantee, nor is it a substitute for, other measures needed to improve the human condition in all parts of the world. Certainly in our own country, health care, decent housing, adequate nutrition, education, meaningful work, personal safety and dignity seem essential to foster and sustain the individual's capacity for hope. Especially for the poor and disadvantaged among us, their understandable lack of hope constitutes a formidable barrier to the help they need in responsibly planning their procreation or in planning any other important aspect of their lives beyond sheer survival on a day-to-day basis. If birth control assistance is aggressively pushed on the poor without concurrent and tangible efforts to improve their life chances substantially, their "anti-establishment" reactions and suspicions will, with considerable justification be exacerbated.

Unplanned, unwanted and unwelcome babies are only one of the many afflictions visited upon the billions of people now alive. But they are a vicissitude that we can do something about. Now is the time to make an ever larger series of beginnings to foster and facilitate responsible, personal decisions regard-

ing procreation. From these beginnings we can adapt on a pragmatic basis the more successful efforts for application in new settings while our failures can be consciously abandoned and not unwittingly (or witlessly) repeated again and again. In the process, we will have enlarged the individual's control over his life circumstances and his readiness to seek rational means for mastery over other afflictions he no longer needs endure.

Nevertheless, we must recognize that adhering to the principle of free choice by the individual, does not automatically assure reduction in fertility on a scale and at a pace one might on an abstract basis consider desirable. We may be lucky and the world may be able to de-fuse the so-called "Population Bomb" by trusting individuals to act in their own best interests when they are given the means to do so and can have a reasonable awareness of the consequences of their actions for themselves, their neighborns, and their descendents. If instead we rely on blatant coercion or "subtle" manipulation to take from couples their options with respect to bearing children, we still cannot guarantee that the birth rate would fall before the government does. And we would probably be embarking on a course of increasingly brutual oppression which would unduly postpone if not extinguish human freedom and responsible self-government. The herd manager and the game warden are not very appealing models to emulate in the management of human affairs.

Commitment to voluntary family planning, enabling a couple to regulate its family size and respecting its right to do so, is an experiment in freedom consistent with our traditonal emphasis on the dignity of the indiviudal. Whatever the ultimate demographic consequences, there seems to be no practical or acceptable alternative to fulfilling that commitment and allowing people collectively to hammer out their common future. Given increased control over their destiny, it does not seem reasonable to believe that human beings will knowingly build for themselves a Hobbesian future in which life is "nasty, brutish, and short"